



Town of Darien

David Knauf, MPH, MS, RS

Director of Health

e-mail: dknauf@darienct.gov

Barrington Bogle, MPH, RS, CHES

Assistant Director of Health

e-mail: bbogle@darienct.gov

Emergency Medication Dispensing Exercise **Darien, CT**

Executive Summary

By David Knauf, MS, MPH, RS
Director of Health

The ability to respond rapidly and efficiently to public health emergencies is a challenge facing all health departments, especially those with limited staff. Preparation and planning are key components in providing effective service to residents under trying conditions. The Centers for Disease Control has directed local health departments to develop plans to rapidly dispense medication to large numbers of residents. To address this need, the Darien Health Department (DHD) began by examining some demographic data available for the community.



According to the 2010 Census, Darien has 20,732 residents and 6,556 households. Of these households, the census reports that 35.6% had children under the age of 18. The most recent Board of Education Enrollment Report of October 2011 stated that there are 4817 students in the public school system. Based on this information,

the DHD developed a hypothesis that by distributing medication to families with children attending the public schools, emergency medication could be provided to nearly half of the town's residents in a single morning. To test this school-based model for the rapid distribution of medication to residents of Darien, the DHD, in conjunction with the Darien Public School system conducted a school emergency medication exercise on October 11, 2011 at Middlesex Middle School.

The basic plan was to utilize a vehicle based drive-through model for medicine dispensing. Two different colored mints were used to simulate medication, with 600 blue mints purchased to represent pediatric medication and 600 silver mints for adult medication. Parents were notified via the existing school email notification system that the exercise would be taking place on Tuesday, October 11, 2011 at "drop-off" time, from 7:00 a.m. to 7:50 a.m.

In order to maximize efficiency during the 50-minute drop-off time, there was no paperwork other than a take-away one page flyer explaining the purpose of the exercise. A series of dispensing stations were set up in locations where parents routinely dropped students off. As the cars came through, volunteer staff members asked each driver how many people were in their household and an appropriate number of mints were dispensed relative to the information given. There was no attempt to verify the accuracy of this information and no identification was required.

It was an intense exercise with all mints distributed in approximately 30 minutes. After the mints were gone, staff continued to tally the basic family information manually until the drop-off time ended at 7:50 a.m. Within this 50 minute time period, “medication” was dispensed to 784 adults and 963 to those less than 18 years of age for a total of 1747.

The results demonstrated that a simple school-based non-medical model provided rapid distribution of “medication” to nearly 10% of town residents within one hour at a single school. Extrapolated across the entire school district, this approach could provide medication for approximately half of town residents within a few hours, enabling the Health Department time to then focus on the remaining town residents. While a variety of conditions and limitations may exist in a real emergency, this exercise provides strong evidence that a simple school-based distribution system can be an effective first tactic for mass emergency medication dispensing in communities with similar demographics as Darien.



The event planning team was composed of DHD staff including David Knauf, Director of Health; Molly Larson, RN, Public Health Nurse; Caleb Moore, MD, Darien Medical Advisor; and Scot Phelps, Public Health Emergency Preparedness Consultant. The Darien school district was represented by Superintendent of Schools Stephen Falcone, and Middlesex Middle School Principal Debi Boccanfuso. Planning the event began in May 2011 with regular meetings through September 2011.

Many thanks to all those who helped to make this a successful event, especially Dr. Stephen Falcone, Debi Boccanfuso, all the volunteers, and all of the parents who graciously and patiently participated in the exercise.

To obtain the complete “After Action Report” of this exercise, please contact David Knauf by email at dknauf@darienct.gov